

THE INFLUENCE OF DOROTHY WORDSWORTH  
ON HER BROTHER WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

by

Katie Armonella Moore

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
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Thesis

The Influence of Dorothy Wordsworth  
On Her Brother William Wordsworth

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by

Katie Armonella Moore  
(Th.B., Gordon College, 1938)

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## CHAPTER I

### PURPOSE

There often comes a time in the lives of all men when a new and absorbing influence bids fair to overcome an old influence, even though the new is less natural to the one concerned. This experience happened in the life of William Wordsworth, the great poet of nature. In the "Prelude" he tells that during his youth he had been constantly in touch with nature; and that he had constantly grown in sympathy with and in love for nature. Proof of this love and sympathy that bore promise of what he would do are found in his early poems, "An Evening Walk", and "Descriptive Sketches". His early career was cut off by a visit to France where he became very much interested in the French Revolution, in fact, he became so interested that he gave himself over completely to the cause of France. With this new interest in view he forgot about nature and poetry and became completely absorbed in politics and metaphysics. Then, he began to wander in the field of metaphysics until finally by the influence and guidance of Dorothy he found himself and returned to nature and poetry.

My purpose in this paper is to show that during this period of interest in metaphysics when it seemed as if he would lose all interest in nature and poetry, his sister Dorothy bore a tremendous influence by her helpful and loving guidance. First, I wish to show that it was by her influence that Wordsworth gave up his metaphysics and became interested again in nature. Secondly, that during the productive and formative period of the poet's life (1795 - 1805) his work shows in choice of subject, thought and diction the



underlying influence of his sister Dorothy.





## CHAPTER II

### LIFE OF DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

Dorothy Wordsworth was the third child and only daughter of John W. and Anne Cookson Wordsworth. She was born December 25, 1771, making her a year and eight months younger than her brother William. She spent the first twelve years of her life at Cockermouth. After the death of her father and mother, she was sent in 1783 to live with her maternal grandmother. She was adopted by her uncle in 1787 and lived in his Norfolk parish in Fornsett. When she was told that this change was to take place she was nearly overcome with joy, as she had not been happy at Penrith. Here she had time to read, walk and work, and could do practically as she pleased.

William Wordsworth was at Cambridge from which he graduated in 1791. Shortly after his graduation he made a trip to the Continent and also spent time in different parts of England and Wales. Then he and Dorothy visited the lake region of England. At this time he received the Raisley Calvert legacy, which gave him his freedom from having to follow a profession in order to earn a living. He and Dorothy then combined their money and had a home, Dorothy being his housekeeper.

The brother and sister settled down at Racedown. It was here at Racedown that they met Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Their acquaintance became a close and uninterrupted friendship, to be ended only by death. From here in 1797 they went to Alfoxden where they remained until the latter part of 1798 when they visited Germany. They went into the lake country in 1800 and settled at Dove Cottage, Grasmere. In 1802 Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson,





but his marriage did not interfere with his relation to his sister who continued to live with him. From here they moved to Rydal Mount. This was her last home as she died there, January 25, 1855, five years after the death of her brother.



### CHAPTER III

#### INFLUENCE OF DOROTHY WORDSWORTH ON WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

It was during this period which I am considering, 1794 - 1805, that Dorothy and William were a great deal together. Dorothy had had plenty of time to have influenced to a great extent the life of her brother as he was in need of helpful guidance and influence.

There are two qualities in the life of Dorothy, which were a strong influence on Wordsworth. First, there was a strong, genuine and continuous love between the brother and sister. This love must have been stronger than is generally found between brother and sister. This love formed between the two a feeling of likeness, as well as a union of the two souls. Secondly, Dorothy must have had an emotional temperament which leaned strongly toward a poetical tendency. If she had not been poetical she could never have influenced Wordsworth, as all authors agree that William Wordsworth's nature was essentially poetic. Even though he had become mixed with revolutionary tendencies, that nature was not destroyed but only overshadowed. He needed loving and sympathetic guidance to bring him back to his early interests.

In the correspondence of the brother and sister before 1795 and in William Wordsworth's poetry are found the strongest proofs of this love. When they were separated between the years, 1783 - 1794, their thoughts were often of each other and when they could be together again. The letters which Dorothy wrote to her friends were full of her brother. She wrote to Jane Pollard in 1790:



I long to have an opportunity of introducing you to my dear William. I am anxious about him now as he will shortly have to provide for himself. <sup>1</sup>

In 1793 she wrote:

We (she and her brother) have been endeared to each other by early misfortune. We in the same moment lost a father, a mother, and a home. We have been equally deprived of our patrimony. . . These afflictions have all contributed to unite us closer by the bonds of affection, notwithstanding we have been compelled to spend our youth asunder. . . neither absence, nor distance, nor time, can ever break the chain that links me to my brother. <sup>2</sup>

Even when her brother was wrapped up in revolutionary interests, she felt that he still had a strong interest in poetry. She spoke of his poems, "An Evening Walk", and "Descriptive Sketches", as follows:

There are some glaring faults but I hope that you will discover many beauties which could only have been created by the imagination of the poet. <sup>3</sup>

A paragraph from Dorothy's "Journal" written in 1800 shows a deep love, deeper than is usually found between brother and sister. William and a younger brother John were starting on a trip which lasted from May 14 to June 6. Dorothy wrote:

My heart was so full that I could hardly speak to William when I gave him a farewell kiss. I sate a long time upon a stone at the margin of the lake, and after a flood of tears my heart was easier. The lake looked to me, I knew not why, dull and melancholy, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, William, Life of Wordsworth, Vol. I. Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1907. p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 79.







weltering on the shore seemed a heavy sound. . . (That night she wrote:) Oh that I had a letter from William.<sup>4</sup>

Dorothy was not alone in this desire to be with William. It was a mutual affection. He, too, expressed his desire to be with his sister and longed for the time when they could be continuously together. He felt that their appreciation of and sympathy with nature was so similar that he could be identified with his sister if they could be together. He wrote, September 6, 1790, from the Lake of Constance:

I have thought of you perpetually; and never have my eyes burst upon a scene of particular loveliness but I have almost instantly wished that you could for a moment be transported to the place where I stood.<sup>5</sup>

Then in his first poem, "An Evening Walk", which is addressed to his sister, he says:

Even now she decks for me a distant scene,  
(For dark and broad the gulf of time between)  
Gilding that cottage with fondest ray,  
(Sole bourne, sole wish, sole object of my way;  
How fair its lawns and sheltering woods appear!)  
Where we, my Friend, to happy hours shall rise,  
Till our small share of hardly-paining sighs  
(For sighs will ever trouble human breath)  
Creeps hushed into the tranquil breath of death.<sup>6</sup>

It is a significant fact that the poet addressed this first poem which expressed so concretely the influence of nature upon him, to his sister. It showed that he found in her an understanding and sympathetic soul.

In all probability the strongest proof of the love and sympathy of the brother and sister lies in the fact that he was constantly seeking her

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<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. I, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Vol. I

<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904. p. 8, lines 345-354.



society for trips, both long and short. Throughout his poetry he shows that he loved to be with his sister and found inspiration in her presence.

In the poem, "To My Sister", he urged her to come out into the open so that they together might draw the truths of nature into their souls.

My sister! 'tis a wish of mine  
Now that our morning meal is done,  
Make haste, your morning task resign;  
Come forth and feel the sun.

And from the blessed power that rolls  
About, below, above,  
We'll frame the measure of our souls:  
They shall be turned to love.

Then come, my Sister! come, I pray,  
With speed put on your woodland dress;  
And bring no books; for this one day  
We'll give to idleness. <sup>7</sup>

It has been well established that the poems addressed "To Lucy" were really intended for Dorothy. They are a carcanet of lyrics, charged with love. In them Wordsworth gives hints of Dorothy's appearance and charm.

She shall be sportive as a fawn  
That wild with glee across the lawn  
On up the mountain springs;  
And hers shall be the breathing balm,  
And hers the silence and the calm  
Of mute insensate things.

The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face. <sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt that Wordsworth fully realized his debt to his sister, as is given in his poems. William wrote:

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<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth, William. Poems. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. To My Sister, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., To Lucy. Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower, p.113.





How much do I wish that each motion of pleasure or pain within me, by that sympathy which will almost identify us when we have stolen into our little cottage . . . will write to my uncle, and tell him I cannot think of going anywhere before I have been with you. Whatever answer he gives me, I certainly will make a point of once more mingling my transports with yours. Alas! my dear sister, how soon must this happiness expire; yet there are moments worth ages. . . Oh, my dear, dear sister, with what transport shall I again wear out the day in your sight! . . . I see you in a moment running, or rather flying, into my arms. 9

She was a physician to the spirit of William. She observed the symptoms, as she had known what manner of man her brother had been in health; and her love told her that she had within her the power to restore him. Loving his sister as he did, William could not long withhold his response. Delight in her delight quickened within him as they shared their daily life; in striving to return to her something of the joy her presence gave to him his mind was gradually distracted from its twofold burden, the thought of the French Revolution and of Annette. To show this let us turn to the poem "The Glow-Worm", which he had placed there for her delight:

Among all lovely things my Love had been,  
Had noted well the stars, all flowers that grew  
About her home; but she had never seen  
A Glow-worm, never once, and this I knew.

While riding near her home one stormy night  
A single Glow-worm did I chance to espy;  
I gave a fervent welcome to the sight,  
And from my horse I leapt, great joy had I.

Upon a leaf the Glow-worm did I lay,  
To bear it with me through the stormy night;  
And, as before, it shone without dismay;  
Albeit putting forth a fainter light.

When to the Dwelling of my Love I came,  
I went into the orchard quietly;  
And left the Glow-worm, blessing it by name,  
Laid safely by itself, beneath a Tree.





The whole next day, I hoped, and hoped with fear;  
 At night the Glow-worm shone beneath the Tree!  
 I led my Lucy to the spot, 'Look here!'  
 Oh! joy it was for her, and joy for me. 10

In truth, Dorothy saved her brother's soul alive. He fully realized it and in his darkest hour of trial and perplexity he wrote:

. . . then it was  
 That the beloved Woman in whose sight  
 Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice  
 Of sudden admonition, like a brook  
 That did but cross a lonely road, and now  
 Seen, heard and felt, and caught at every turn,  
 Companion never lost through many a league,  
 Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
 With my true self; for, though impair'd and chang'd  
 Much, as it seemed, I was no further chang'd  
 Than as a clouded, not a waning moon!  
 She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
 A poet, made me seek beneath that name  
 My office upon earth, and nowhere else. 11

Not only did Dorothy preserve the poet in him, but she guided the bent of his poetical mind. The lines composed on the last day of the tour of Scotland and finished as they re-entered Bristol was the fullest tribute to what Dorothy had been to him ever since she had joined him at Racedown three years before:

For thou art with me here upon the banks  
 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,  
 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch  
 The language of my former heart, and read  
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while  
 May I behold thee what I was once,  
 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,  
 Knowing that Nature never did betray  
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy! for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress

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10 Wordsworth, William. Poems. p. 277.

11 Ibid., Bk. X, The Prelude, lines 908-921.



With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessing. Therefore let the morn  
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;  
 And let the misty mountain-winds be free  
 To blow against thee; and, in after years,  
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured  
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind  
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
 Thy memory be as a dwelling place  
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,  
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or griefs,  
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance —  
 If I should be where I no more can hear  
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes, these gleams  
 Of past existence — wilt thou then forget  
 That on the banks of this delightful stream  
 We stood together; and that I, so long  
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came  
 Unwearied in that service; rather say  
 With warmer love — oh! with far deeper zeal  
 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget  
 That after many wanderings, many years  
 Of absence, these deep woods and lofty cliffs,  
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
 More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake! 12

We find in "The Prelude" the poet gives a description of a summer  
 vacation spent with his sister, when he

Was blest  
 Between these sundry wanderings with joy  
 Above all joys, that seemed another morn  
 Risen on midnight; blest with the presence, Friend,  
 Of that sole Sister, her who hath been long  
 Dear to thee also, thy true friend and mine,  
 Now, after separation desolate,  
 Restored to me — such absence that she seemed  
 A gift then first bestowed. The varied banks

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12 Wordsworth, William. Poems. Lyrical Ballads, p. 93.





Of Emont, hitherto unnamed in song,  
 And that monastic castle; mid tall trees,  
 Low-standing by the margin of the stream,  
 A mansion visited (as fame reports)  
 By Sidney, where, in sight of our Helvellyn,  
 Or stormy Cross-fell, snatches he might pen  
 Of his Arcadia, by fraternal love  
 Inspired; — that river and those mouldering towers  
 Have seen us side by side, when, having clomb  
 The darksome windings of a broken stair  
 And crept along a ridge of fractured wall,  
 Now without trembling, we in safety looked  
 Forth, through some Gothic window's open space,  
 And gathered with one mind a rich reward  
 From the far-stretching landscape, by the light  
 Of morning beautified, or purple eve;  
 Or, not less pleased, lay on some turret's head,  
 Catching from tufts of grass and hare-bell flowers  
 Their faintest whisper to the passing breeze,  
 Given out while mid-day had oppressed the plains. <sup>13</sup>

These quotations show that the love of Dorothy and William for each other was so strong as to identify the one with the other. Thus we find that no hindrance was offered to her in her influence over her brother.

Let us consider the second point. Did Dorothy possess a poetical temperament which would sympathize and harmonize with that of the poet? I mean by this, were her senses keen and sensitive to feel and to appreciate what was in the world about her? Did the elements of Nature cause any reaction in the soul of the sister?

Various things have been told by Wordsworth which show without a doubt that Dorothy possessed the emotional temperament of a poet. Very few of us are moved to tears by the works of nature, but such was the case of Dorothy. In the Fenwick note to his poem entitled "On A High Part of the Coast of Cumberland", he told of the coast and sea by the town and port of Whitehaven.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., The Prelude, p. 161, lines 195-225.





One day when they were walking and the beautiful sight of the waves breaking on the quays and piers came into view from the top of a hill, Dorothy burst into tears. It was the first time that she had heard the voice of the sea. They then lived at Cockermouth and this incident was often mentioned among them, as it indicated a sensibility for which she was so remarkable.

This same thing happened again in later life, 1836, after she had been weakened by sickness. Mary Wordsworth wrote:

Dear Dorothy is now asleep after having been for half an hour in the garden, drawn by James in the garden chair, and attended by Dora, Jane and myself. On first going out she wept aloud like a baby, being overcome by the beauty around her, and asked to be taken to a certain spot whence she has lately been supplied with flowers. At first she was too overpowered to look upon it; afterwards she became calm, and enjoyed everything she saw like her old self. Then, being brought homeward, a new sensation was created when she reached the shady green lawn. On a sudden she began to sing, which she continued to do until James took her in the house. <sup>14</sup>

William paid a very high honor to his sister's sensitiveness to what was in the world about her, when he said in "The Sparrow's Nest", written in 1801:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;  
And humble cares, and delicate fears;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;  
And love, and thought, and joy. <sup>15</sup>

Again in "The Recluse", the poet, overjoyed with the new home at Grasmere, said of his sister:

Her voice was like a hidden bird that sang.  
The thought of her was like a flash of light,  
Or an unseen companionship, a breath  
Of fragrance independent of the wind  
In all my goings, in the new and the old  
Of all my meditations, and in this  
Favourite of all, in this the most of all. <sup>16</sup>

The thought in these last three lines that Dorothy was with her

<sup>14</sup> Knight, William, Ed. Letters of the Wordsworth Family. Boston and London: Ginn and Company. Vol. III, p.103.

<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth, William. Poems. The Sparrow's Nest, p. 262.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., The Recluse, p. 223, lines 91-99.



brother in all his goings and in his meditations most of all is suggestive that her nature must have been very much like that of the poet, otherwise he would not have found her a pleasurable companion.

Thomas De Quincey and Samuel Coleridge, two of the leading literary men of that time, testify as to the emotional temperament and the keen sensibility of Dorothy Wordsworth.

De Quincey, in his usual gossip way, gave a rather uncomplimentary personal sketch of Miss Wordsworth. He said that

"her sensibility seemed constitutionally deep; and some subtle force of impassioned intellect apparently burned within her; which being alternately pushed first forward and then backward gave her a conspicuous expression by the irrepressible instincts of temperament and then immediately checked, in obedience to decorum of her sex and age, and her maidenly condition, gave to her whole demeanor and to her conversation an air of embarrassment and even of self-conflict, that was sometimes distressing to witness. <sup>17</sup>

After continuing this uncomplimentary sketch he went on to say:

But on the other hand, she was a person of very remarkable endowments intellectually; and in addition to the other great services which she rendered to her brother, this I may mention as greater than all the rest, and it was one which equally operated to the benefit of every casual companion in a walk, — viz., the exceeding sympathy, always ready, always profound, by which she made all that one could tell her, all that one could describe, all that one could quote from a foreign author reverberate, as it were, a plusieurs reprises, to one's own feelings by the manifest impression it made on her. The pulses of life are not more quick or more inevitable in their flow and undulation, than were the answering and echoing movements of her sympathizing attention. <sup>18</sup>

This character he summed up again in one brief abstract by saying that as a companion, she was the very wildest person he had ever known, and also the truest, most inevitable and at the same time, the quickest and readiest in her sympathy with either joy or sorrow, with laughter or tears,

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<sup>17</sup> De Quincey, Thomas. Literary Reminiscences. New York and London: Macmillan and Company, 1895-1905. p. 275.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 277.





with realities of life or the larger realities of the poets.

Coleridge gave out in more concise statements the same idea of the quick perception and sympathetic understanding of everything which she saw and heard. Coleridge, writing to Mr. Cottle, said:

Wordsworth and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed; in mind, I mean, and heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty; but her manners are simple, ardent, and impressive. In every motion the most innocent soul outbeams so brightly that who saw her would say; Guilt was a thing impossible in her; her information various; her eye watchful in the minutest observations of Nature; and her taste a perfect electro-meter. It bends, protrudes, and draws in at the subtlest beauties and most recondite faults.

She won the sympathy and respectful regard of every man worthy to approach her. All of us loved her — by which us I mean especially Prof. Wilson and myself, together with such Oxford or Cambridge men or<sup>19</sup> men from Scotland as either of us or others introduced into her society.

Such was the opinion of two of the leading literary men of the time. One does not wonder that with such power over others that she was all in all with her brother.

Thus, Dorothy's emotional nature and her sensibility were unusually strong and developed in the minds of De Quincey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. These three who were so intimately connected with Dorothy Wordsworth were by far the better judges of her emotional powers than any one else could be. She was almost constantly with her brother. She met Coleridge for the first time while she and her brother were living at Racedown, 1795-1797, and from that time on until a misunderstanding occurred about 1825, Coleridge was frequently at the Wordsworth home, at times spending three weeks there. De Quincey lived for some time in the lake region, in fact, living in Dove

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 364.





Cottage after the Wordsworths left it. Dorothy herself prepared the cottage for him before he occupied it. Therefore, we find that these three had plenty of opportunity to judge Dorothy's nature.

Countless examples showing the emotional nature of Dorothy might be taken from Miss Wordsworth's own works, her "Journals" of home life and of the many tours which she took with her brother, also from her letters and a few poems. To show this we will compare her works with that of her brother. A statement from the Encyclopedia Britannica sums up her ability with respect to her literary power:

Dorothy claims an independent place in literature as one of the earliest writers who noted in language delicately chosen, and with no other object than to preserve their fugitive beauty the little picturesque phenomena of homely country life.<sup>20</sup>

Dorothy Wordsworth is probably the most distinguished and remarkable of English writers who never wrote a line for the public. Although she often had a pen in her hand, and her unique literary gift was fully recognized by a wide circle of friends and among them the finest critics of the age, her only composition to be printed were short extracts from her journals and letters which her brother quoted in notes to his poems or rehandled for insertion in his "Guide to the Lakes".

She kept "Journals" in Germany and at Grasmere, but they were intended only for the eye of her brother. She makes no pretension to continuous literary form, but her notes are set down from day to day, as the mood struck her. In the "Journals" are found a quick sympathetic response to all that surrounded her in the worlds of man and Nature, expressed often with a delicate imaginative insight, and everywhere with a moving simplicity are the homeliest

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<sup>20</sup>

Encyclopedia Britannica.



details of household management and of the goings-on of every day. It is a document of real life.

The "Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland" is undoubtedly her masterpiece. It is not written as the "Grasmere Journal", but turned out to be a delightful book on travel. Her eyes always seemed to be open, nothing escaped her.

One writer says:

Dorothy's "Journals" convey an almost breathless ecstasy of love toward William, a tremulous sensitiveness toward everything that concerns her brother, who is referred to as "my Beloved". A very beautiful passage is the one made for March 23, 1802:

"He is now reading Ben Johnson. It is about 10 o'clock, a quiet night. The fire flutters, and the watch ticks. I hear nothing save the breathing of my Beloved, and he now and then pushes his book forward, and turns over a leaf." 21 22

William showed the same feeling toward his sister, as may be found in his poems.

De Quincey said that the title "Gift of God"<sup>23</sup> well applied to Dorothy, because it showed the relation with which she was charged — to wait upon her brother as the most faithful and tenderest of domestics; to love him as a sister; to sympathize with him as a confidante; to counsel him; to cheer and sustain him; and above all to engraft upon his sense of beauty a delicacy and grace which he otherwise would not have had.

Sympathy was very strong between the brother and sister, not only because of unusually strong love between them, but also because of the poetic, emotional temperament of the sister which harmonized with that of the poet.

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21 Theodore Maynard, Wordsworth's Exquisite Sister. The Catholic World. Office of the Catholic World, 41 West 59th Street, New York. 1935. p. 528.

22 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.

23 De Quincey, Thomas. Literary Reminiscences. New York and London: Macmillan and Company, 1895-1905.





Through this we find that no hindrance was offered to the sister's influence over the brother.

Let us see in what ways this influence manifested itself between the years 1794 - 1805. First, let us see what the sister's connection was with the poet's return to Nature interest after the French Revolution had caused him to become absorbed in political and metaphysical interests. "The Prelude", a biographical poem, completely reviewed this period in Wordsworth's life.

Toward the end of his college career, Wordsworth and his friend Robert Jones visited the Alps. This was in 1790 at the time when the Revolution fervor was at its beginning. Wordsworth was influenced by the spirit of the times and after his graduation he went to France to study the language. He was so much interested by the Revolutionary principles that he intended to offer himself to the cause, but he was stopped by lack of money, making it necessary for him to return to England.

There his interest in the French Revolution reached its greatest height. This overpowering absorption even caused him to forget, for the time being, the foremost interest of his youth — the aspects and influences of Nature. Laying all these aside, he devoted himself to political principles.

However, it was not long before the course of affairs and events in France were a disappointment to him. He says in "The Prelude":

But now, become oppressors in their turn,  
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence  
For one of conquest, losing sight of all



Which they had struggled for: up mounted now  
 Openly in the eyes of earth and heaven  
 The scale of liberty. I read her doom,  
 With anger vexed, with disappointment sore,  
 But not dismayed, nor taking to the shame  
 Of a false prophet. <sup>24</sup>

Wordsworth now began an intellectual investigation of the situation;  
 he demanded proof for the change in the attitude of the French. He said:

I summoned my best skill, and toiled, intent  
 To anatomise the frame of social life;  
 Yea the whole body of society  
 Searched to its heart. <sup>25</sup>

During this time of disappointment of Wordsworth in his ideals of  
 liberty and his indecision as to whether he should choose the church, the  
 bar, or literature as a life career, he and his sister walked together through  
 the lake country. This was in 1794 just before he received the legacy which  
 made him independent of a profession. The result of his sister's companion-  
 ship is best expressed by the words of Wordsworth in "The Prelude" :

Depressed, bewildered thus, I did not walk  
 With scoffers, seeking light and gay revenge  
 From indiscriminate laughter, nor sate down  
 In reconciliation with an utter waste  
 Of intellect, such sloth I could not brook,  
 (Too well I loved, in that my spring of life,  
 Pains-taking thoughts, and truth, their dear reward.)  
 But to abstract science, and there sought  
 Work for the reasoning faculty enthroned  
 Where the disturbances of space and time —  
 Whether in matters various, properties  
 Inherent, or from human will and power  
 Derived — find no admission. Then it was —  
 Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good! —  
 That the beloved Sister in whose sight  
 Those days were passed, now speaking in voice  
 Of sudden admonition — like a brook  
 That did but cross a lonely road, and now  
 Is seen, heard, felt and caught at every turn,

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<sup>24</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New  
 York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. The Prelude, p. 205, lines 206-214.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 205, lines 279-282.





Companion never lost through many a league --  
 Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
 With my true self; for though bedimmed and changed  
 Than as a clouded and a waning moon:  
 She whispered still that brightness would return;  
 She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
 A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,  
 And that alone, my office upon earth. 26

From this section of "The Prelude" we learn that the poet was in a bewildered and depressed state of mind by the turn which the French Revolution had taken. He could not believe that the advocates of liberty and freedom which seemed so wonderful to him could become oppressors in their turn. Not being able to give up the problem at this time he turned to metaphysics or abstract science, which he said had no solution for his subject or for any subject from human will or power derived. It was then that his sister came to his relief during their trip to the lake region. She encouraged him but the poet said that the most important of all she

. . . preserved me still  
 A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,  
 And that alone, my office upon earth. 27

Hardly a stronger or more important proof of the sister's influence could be found. .

As we look again into "The Prelude" we find that the poet expresses his gratitude for Dorothy's inspiration which drew him from political interest to his earlier poetical interests. He says:

Child of my parents! Sister of my soul!  
 Thanks in sincerest verse have been elsewhere  
 Poured out for all the early tenderness  
 Which I have from thee imbibed! and 'tis most true  
 That later seasons owed to thee no less;  
 For, spite of all thy sweet influence and the touch  
 Of kindred hands that opened out the springs

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26 Ibid., p. 206, lines 321-348.

27 Ibid., p. 206, lines 346-348.





Of genial thought in childhood, and in spite  
 Of all that unassisted I had marked  
 In life or nature of those charms minute  
 That win their way into the heart by stealth  
 (Still to the very going-out of youth)  
 I too exclusively esteemed that love,  
 And sought that beauty, which, as Milton sings  
 Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down  
 This over-sternness; but for thee, dear Friend,  
 My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had stood  
 In her original self too confident,  
 Retained too long a countenance severe;  
 A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds  
 Familiar, and a favorite of the stars!  
 But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,  
 Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,  
 And teach the little birds to build their nests  
 And warble in its chambers. At a time  
 When Nature, destined to remain so long  
 Foremost in my affections, had fallen back  
 Into a second place, pleased to become  
 A handmaid to a nobler than herself,  
 When every day brought with it some new sense  
 Of exquisite regard for common things,  
 And all the earth was budding with these gifts  
 Of more refined humanity, thy breath,  
 Dear Sister! was a kind of gentler spring  
 That went before my steps. <sup>28</sup>

In this section the poet thanks his sister for the softening effect she had upon the over-sternness of his nature. This over-sternness had brought a decrease of interest in nature. In fact, nature had fallen back into a second place. He spoke of his sister as an inspiration, "a kind of gentler spring that went before my steps". <sup>29</sup>

This softening effect which Dorothy had upon the poet at this crisis in his life is proved by other words of the poet in regard to the tenderness and gentleness of her nature. In the poem "To A Butterfly" the poet represents the difference between her and himself:

Oh! pleasant, pleasant were the days,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.219, lines 232-266.

<sup>29</sup> Loc. cit., lines 265-266.



The time, when, in our childish plays,  
 My sister Emmeline and I  
 Together chased the butterfly!  
 A very hunter did I rush  
 Upon the prey: — with leaps and springs  
 I followed on to break and bush;  
 But she, God love her, feared to brush  
 The dust from off its wings. <sup>30</sup>

William Wordsworth wrote Charles Lamb concerning his sister,  
 "In tenderness of heart I do not honestly believe that she was ever exceeded  
 by any of God's creatures. Her loving kindness has no bounds. God bless  
 her ever and ever." <sup>31</sup>

Her nature was such that:

Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green fields,  
 Could they have known her, would have loved; methought  
 Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,  
 That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,  
 And intimation how she bore herself  
 Towards them and to all creatures, God delights  
 In such a being; for, her common thoughts  
 Are piety, her life is gratitude. <sup>32</sup>

Therefore, we find by the poet's own admission he was brought back  
 from politics to nature by the inspiring courage of his sister.

The Bishop of London, nephew of the poet, writing to Dorothy at the  
 time of William's return from France, added testimony to this fact. He said  
 that she was endowed with tender sensibility; with an exquisite perception of  
 beauty; with a retentive recollection of what she saw; with a felicitous tact  
 in discerning and admirable skill in delineating natural objects with graphic  
 accuracy and vivid gracefulness. She weaned him from

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<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York:  
 Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 276.

<sup>31</sup> Knight, William, Ed., Letters of the Wordsworth Family. Boston and  
 London: Ginn and Company, 1907.

<sup>32</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York:  
 Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 209, The Prelude, lines 165-170.







contemporary politics and won him back to beauty and nature.

Wordsworth is held dear to those who have read his poems of nature and its influence. Dorothy's influence ought to be held the most important influence in the life of the poet. De Quincey sums up this indebtedness of Wordsworth to Dorothy as follows:

In particular, this mighty obligation through which we also, the admirers and the worshippers through every age of the great poet, are become equally her debtors -- she it was who first couched his eye to the sense of beauty -- humanized him by the gentler charities, and engrafted with her delicate female touch, those graces upon which the richer growths of his nature, which have since clothed the forest of his genius with a foliage corresponding in loveliness and beauty of the strength of its boughs and the massiveness of its trunks. <sup>33</sup>

This interest in nature might have returned without the sister's influence -- that cannot possibly be determined. The matter stands, however, only one conclusion can be reached: through his sister's influence Wordsworth gave up his metaphysical interests and returned to his interest in nature.

After this walk in the lake country Dorothy and her brother settled in Racedown. The sister had relieved William's misanthropy caused by disappointment in the course of the French Revolution, and had revived his interest in nature. The problem now was how to keep this interest alive and to have it expressed in poetry. Professor Knight in his "Life of Wordsworth" speaks of their settlement at Racedown as follows:

And now began what was certainly the most powerful influence over him, if not the most important event in his life . . . that fellowship with his sister, which lasted with scarcely an interval, for fifty-one years, till his death in 1850. <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Knight, William, Life of Wordsworth. 3 vols. Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1907.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



Even though the influence of his sister lasted throughout the poet's life, yet during the period 1795 - 1805, his poetry shows the most evident traces of it; therefore, that is the period with which this paper is concerned. The following parallel cases have been taken from a study of the poetry of William Wordsworth and the prose "Journals" of Dorothy Wordsworth.

Dorothy suggested subjects to her brother. There are enough recorded instances of this direct suggestion to allow us to feel sure that there were many unrecorded.

In the writing of "Lucy Gray" or "Solitude", written in 1799, in the "Notes and Illustrations" of the poems the poet said that it was suggested to him by a circumstance told him by his sister of a little girl who, not far from Halifax, in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snowstorm. Then in his note to the poem "The Beggars", written in 1802, he said that the beggars described in it were met and described by his sister. She met them near the quarry at the head of Rydal Lake, April 17, 1802. Dorothy wrote concerning a robin which was chasing a scarlet butterfly. The next day William Wordsworth wrote the poem on "The Robin and the Butterfly" or as expressed in the poem "The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly".

There is a difference in the color of the butterfly. The poem has the butterfly crimson while the sister's "Journal" has it scarlet. Evidently the beautiful colors made an impression on the poet as well as the cruelty of the robin chasing the butterfly.

What aileth thee. . . 'Tis all that he has,  
His beautiful wings, leave him alone. <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Wordsworth, William, *Poems*, Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. "To A Butterfly", p. 278.





Dorothy wrote April 28, 1802, "I happened to say that when I was a child, I would not pick strawberry blossoms . . . At dinner time he came in with the poem of 'Children Gathering Flowers'." <sup>36</sup> This poem is now known as "Foresight".

That is the work of waste  
I am older Anne.

. . . . .  
God hath given  
Spare the flower. <sup>37</sup>

Here we see the forethought of the sister because if she had plucked the flower she would have spoiled the fruit. This appealed to the imagination of the poet and he immediately put it into verse.

The Fenwick notes which precede his poems were dictated by him in later life to Miss Fenwick and many poems which were suggested to him by his sister may have slipped from his mind.

Knight states in his preface to the "Journals": "There is no doubt that, as brother and sister, they made use of the same note-book, some of William's own verses having been written by him in his sister's Journal, the co-partnery may have extended to more than the common use of the same manuscript." <sup>38</sup>

The beggars whom Dorothy described to her brother and who were described in the poem The Beggars, were also written by Dorothy in her Journals under the entry of June 10, 1800. She described them as being very tall, much beyond the height of tall women. They called at her door. They wore long coats and white caps. Their faces were excessively brown, but had once been

<sup>36</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. I, p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 9.





fair. They led bare-footed children by the hands. They followed the trade of tinkers. She gave them bread. One day when she was on her way to Amble-side she saw two of the children at play chasing a butterfly. They were wild figures as they raced back and forth chasing a butterfly. Flowers and laurel leaves were placed in their hats. As she drew near they addressed her with begging hands and the whining voice of sorrow. On her return she met the same group in the city streets.

This scene she described to her brother and he told the same story in his poem "Vagrants". Let us examine the poetry and prose and see how similar the two are.

### D o r o t h y

"A very tall woman much beyond  
the measure of a woman."

"She had on a very long brown  
coat."

"A very white cap."

"Her face was excessively brown."

"I saw her two boys before me at  
play, chasing a butterfly."

"The hat of the elder was wreathed  
round with yellow flowers."

"The younger whose hat was only a  
rimless crown had stuck it round  
with laurel leaves."

"They addressed with the whining  
voice of sorrow."

"O! you could not serve my  
mother, for she is dead."

### W i l l i a m

"She had a tall man's height  
or more."

"She wore a mantle to her feet."

"A cap as white as the new-fallen  
snow."

"Her skin was an Egyptian brown."

"I did espy a pair of little boys at  
play, chasing a butterfly."

"Hat wreathed round with yellow  
flowers."

"The other wore a rimless crown with  
leaves of laurel stuck about."

"Each ready with a plaintive whine."

"That cannot be. She is dead."



"Let's away! and away they flew  
like lightning." <sup>39</sup>

"Come! Come! and off to some other  
play the joyous vagrants flew." <sup>40</sup>

In this comparison we find that the thought is identical throughout, and in some cases the diction is the same, but William gives a more poetical turn to his. Dorothy's description was written June 10, 1800, and William's poem, according to the Cambridge Edition, was written in 1802. This gave added proof that he got his inspiration and that he is indebted to Dorothy for this poem.

The following entry is found in Dorothy's Grasmere Journal under the date Friday, October 3, 1800:

When William and I returned . . . we met an old man almost double. He had a coat, thrown over his shoulders, above his waistcoat and coat. Under this he carried a bundle, and had an apron on and a night-cap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes and a long nose. . . He was of Scotch parents, but had been born in the army. He had had a wife, and she was a good woman, and it pleased God to bless them with ten children. All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches were scarce, and he had not strength for it. He lived by begging, and was making his way to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell. He said leeches were scarce, partly owing to this dry season, but many years they have been scarce. He supposed it was owing to their being much sought after, that they did not breed fast, and were slow of growth. Leeches were formerly 2s. 6d. per 100; they are now 30s. He had been hurt driving a cart, his leg was broken, his body driven over, his skull fractured. He felt no pain until he recovered from his first insensibility. <sup>41</sup>

This same leech-gatherer was used by William Wordsworth in his poem "Resolution and Independence", which was written in 1802. William uses the

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<sup>39</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 275.

<sup>41</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. London; Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. I, p. 50.







leech-gatherer in subordination to the philosophical thought of the poem, yet there are passages which are parallel to Dorothy's prose:

Dorothy says, 'his body . . . pilgrimage', whereas William's statement is "We men, an old man bent double". Dorothy tells of the sickness which the old man had suffered. William said: "As if some dire sickness the frame had cast". Dorothy said: 'His trade was gathering leeches but now leeches were scarce, and he had not strength for it'. William said that he had told that he was poor. <sup>42, 43</sup> The poem having been written two years after the prose, there is no doubt but what William got his details in regard to the leech gatherer from his sister's Journals.

Another time, July 20, 1802, Dorothy described a view when she and her brother were crossing Westminster Bridge. She tells of the beautiful morning when they crossed the river in the city, St. Paul's. The river was full of little boats, a most beautiful sight. The houses were overhung with their own smoke, the sun shone brightly, which was one of Nature's own grand spectacles.

The sonnet, Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, was written by William Wordsworth September 3, 1802.

Earth . . . lying still. <sup>44</sup>

Even though this poem was written two months after the walk, it shows the influence of his sister as the poem and prose are very similar.

William said: "The city doth wear the beauty of the morning . . .  
"All bright . . . rock or hill." <sup>45</sup> Valley, rock or hill would be one of

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<sup>42</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. p. 280.

<sup>43</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals.

<sup>44</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. p. 284.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

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Nature's grand spectacles to the Wordsworths. The same elements of the scene are mentioned by both.

D o r o t h y

the boats

the river

St. Paul

W i l l i a m

the ship

the river

towers

46

Because the sonnet, Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, is considered one of William Wordsworth's best, the fact that it is similar to Dorothy's prose is all the more important.

The Green Linnet, another of William's best poems, is very much like the description of the birds given in Dorothy's Journals:

The young bullfinches in their party-colored raiment, bustle about among the blossoms and poise themselves like wire dancers or tumblers, shaking the twigs and dashing off the blossoms.

The little birds busy making love, and pecking the blossoms and bits of moss off the trees. They flutter about and about, and benienth the trees as I lie under them. 47

Here we see the similarity lying in the same subject matter and in the life and bustle of the birds which each brings out. The word flutter is common to both. There is also a likeness which is felt but which is not so tangible as in most of the prose and poetry.

Again in speaking of birds we have Dorothy's description of the call of the raven:

We heard a strange sound in the Bainbiggs wood; it seemed in the wood, but it must have been above it, for presently we saw a raven, very high above us. It called out, and the dome of the sky seemed to echo the sound. It called again and again as it flew onward and the mountains gave back the sound, seeming as if from their center; a musical bell-like answering to the bird's hoarse voice. We heard both the call

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46 Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition, p. 284.

47 Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. Vol. I, p. 124.





of the bird and the echo after we could see him no longer. 48

Let us compare the description of the call of the raven as given by Dorothy with the poem written by William called The Raven.

D o r o t h y

W i l l i a m

"A raven very high above us."

"The solitary raven . . . unseen perchance above all power of sight."

"The dome of heaven seemed to echo."

"Flying athwart the concave of the dark blue dome."

"Bird's hoarse voice."

"One voice, an iron knell." 49

We find the idea of the echo, diminishing and returning, brought out by both. This description was written by Dorothy June 27, 1800. William's description came in Book IV of the "Prelude", which was written between 1795 and 1814. Here it is impossible to establish the priority of Dorothy's description yet they are very similar.

There is a striking parallel between Dorothy's description of the daffodils and William's poem of the daffodils.

The following is a description of the daffodils as found in the prose of Dorothy:

When we were in the woods beyond Cowbarrow Park, we saw a few daffodils close to the waters side. . . As we went along, there were more and yet more; and at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and above them; some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow, for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing. The wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot and a few stragglers higher up;

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 402.



but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity, and life of that one busy highway. <sup>50</sup>

Now let us look at a contrast of the prose and poetry and see how nearly they are in parallelism.

### D o r o t h y

"There was a lonely belt of them along the shore."

"The rest tossed and reeled and and danced and seemed as if they laughed with the wind which blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing."

### W i l l i a m

"They stretched in never ending line Along the margin of the bay."

"Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.  
They out did the sparkling waves in glee.

Such a jocund company.  
My heart dances with the daffodils." <sup>51</sup>

Dorothy's description lacks the effect of the daffodils on the poetry which William brings out, but the details in regard to the daffodils are the same. Dorothy wrote her description April 15, 1802, and William wrote his poem in 1804. There is no doubt but what William read Dorothy's description before he wrote his poem. As we compared the two we proved that he had incorporated in his poem the details in regard to the daffodils as given by Dorothy in her Journals.

Dorothy made many trips with her brother. On the trip in Scotland with her brother Dorothy was much impressed with a highland girl whom she met near Loch Lomond. She wrote as follows:

One of the girls was exceedingly beautiful . . . I think I never heard the English language sound more sweetly than from the mouth of the elder of these girls while she stood at the gate answering our inquiries, her face flushed with rain, her pronunciation was clear and distinct. . .

<sup>50</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. I, p. 106.

<sup>51</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 311.





At this day the innocent merriment of the girls, with their kindness to us, and the beautiful figure and face of the elder, come to my mind whenever I think of the ferry-house and water-fall of Loch Lomond, and I never think of the two girls but the whole image of that romantic spot is before me, a living image, as it will be to my dying day. <sup>52</sup>

The "Highland Girl" is immortalized in William's poem by the same name. In this poem he echoes Dorothy's thoughts of the lastingness of the image.

Nor am I loath, though pleased at heart,  
Sweet Highland Girl, from thee to part;  
For I, methinks, till I grow old,  
As fair before me shall behold,  
As I do now, the cabin small,  
The lake, the bay, the waterfall;  
And thee, the spirit of them all! <sup>53</sup>

Again during the Scotland tour, Dorothy wrote:

We met two neatly dressed women without hats . . . One of them said to us in a friendly, soft tone of voice, "What! You are stepping Westward?" I cannot describe how affecting the simple expression was in that remote place, with the western sky in front, yet glowing with the departing sun. <sup>54</sup>

The poem, "Stepping Westward", was written according to Dorothy in remembrance of her feelings and of his.

The voice was soft, and she who spake  
Was walking by her native lake:  
The salutation had to me  
The very sound of courtesy!  
Its power was felt; and while my eye  
Was fixed upon the glowing sky,  
The echo of the voice enwrought  
A human sweetness with the thought

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<sup>52</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. II, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Wordsworth, William, Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904. p. 297.

<sup>54</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy, Journals. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1941. Vol. II, p. 105.



Of travelling through the world that lay  
Before me in my endless way. <sup>55</sup>

Many other points of interest found in William's poems were mentioned by Dorothy as taking place during this Scotland tour. Dorothy wrote:

It is harvest-time, and the fields were quietly — might I be allowed to say pensively, enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highlands to see a single man employed. <sup>56</sup>

William immortalized this single reaper in his poem "The Solitary Reaper".

Another entry in Dorothy's journal reads:

January 31st, 1802. — William slept very ill. He was tired. We walked around the two lakes. Grasmere was very soft and Rydale was extremely beautiful from the western side. Nab Scar was just topped by a cloud which, cutting it off as high as it could be cut off, made the mountain look uncommonly lofty. <sup>57</sup>

Under date of April 24, 1802, we find William's poem:

#### To the Clouds

Army of Clouds! ye winged Hosts in troops  
Ascending from behind the motionless brow  
Of that tall rock, as from a hidden world,  
Oh, whither with such eagerness of speed?  
What seek ye, or what shun ye? of the gale  
Companions, fear ye to be left behind,  
Or racing o'er your blue ethereal field  
Contend ye with each other? <sup>58</sup>

Again the journal, dated February 16, 1802:

Mr. Graham said he wished William had been with him the other day — he was riding in a post-chaise and he heard a strange cry that he could not understand, the sound continued, and he called the chaise driver to stop. It was a little girl crying as if her heart would burst. She had got up behind the chaise, and her cloak had been caught by the

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<sup>55</sup> Wordsworth, William. Poems. p. 298.

<sup>56</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. Vol. II, p. 118.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>58</sup> Wordsworth, William. Poems. Vol. VIII, p. 142.





wheel, and was jammed in, and it hung there. She was crying after it, poor thing. Mr. Graham took her into the chaise, and her cloak was released from the wheel, but the child's misery did not cease, for her cloak was torn to rags; it had been a miserable cloak before, but she had no other, and it was the greatest sorrow that could befall her. Her name was Alice Fell. She had no parents, and belonged to the next town. At the next town, Mr. G. left money with some respectable people in the town, to buy her a new cloak. 59

William's poem "Alice Fell" grew from this incident:

The post-boy drove with fierce career,  
For threatening clouds the moon had drowned,  
When, as we hurried on, my ear  
Was smitten with a startling sound.

. . . . .

The boy then smacked his whip, and fast  
The horses scampered through the rain;  
But, hearing soon upon the blast  
The cry, I bade him halt again.

Forthwith alighting on the ground,  
'Whence comes', said I, 'this piteous moan?'  
And there a little girl I found,  
Sitting behind the chaise alone.

'My cloak!' no other word she spoke,  
But loud and bitterly she wept,  
As if her innocent heart would break,  
And down from off the seat she leapt.

'What ails you, child?' — she sobbed,  
'Look here!'  
I saw in the wheel entangled,  
A weather-beaten rag as e'er  
From any garden scare-crow dangled.

. . . . .

'And whither are you going, child?'  
'To-night along these lonesome ways?'  
'To Durham', answered she, half wild.—  
'Then come with me into the chaise.'

. . . . .

'My child, in Durham do you dwell?'  
She checked herself in her distress,



And said, 'My name is Alice Fell;  
I'm fatherless and motherless.'

. . . . .

Up to the tavern door we post;  
Of Alice and her grief I told;  
And I gave money to the host,  
To buy a new cloak for the old. 60

On April 24, 1802, Dorothy wrote:

Coleridge stopped up the little runnel by the road-side to make a lake. We all stood to look at Glow-worm Rock — a primrose that grew there, and just looked out on the road from its own sheltered bower. 61

In William's verse we read:

A Rock there is whose homely front  
The passing traveller slights;  
Yet there the glow-worms hand their lamps,  
Like stars at various heights;  
And one coy Primrose to that Rock  
The vernal breeze invites. 62

On the same date Dorothy's journal says:

The clouds moved, as William observed, in one regular body like a multitude in motion — a sky all clouds over, not one cloud. On our return it broke a little out, and we saw here and there a star. One appeared but for a moment in a pale blue sky. 63

William's poem "To the Clouds", has already been noted on page 33.

Again in Dorothy's journal, April 28, 1802:

William was in the orchard. I went to him; he worked away at his poem . . . I happened to mention to say that when I was a child I would not have pulled a strawberry blossom. At dinner time he came in with the poem of Children Gathering Flowers. 64

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60 Wordsworth, William. Poems. p. 274.

61 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. p. 113.

62 Wordsworth, William. Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904.

63 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. London: The Macmillan Company, Ltd., 1941. p. 113. See also William Wordsworth's poem "To the Clouds", in Poems, p. 775.

64 Ibid., p. 113.





And in Wordsworth's poem "Foresight", we read:

Here are daisies, take your fill;  
Pansies and the cuckoo-flower;  
Of the lofty daffodil  
Make your bed or make your bower;  
Fill your lap and fill your bosom;  
Only spare the strawberry-blossom!

God has given a kindlier power  
To the favored strawberry-flower.  
Hither soon as spring has fled  
You and Charles and I will walk;  
Lurking berries, ripe and red,  
Then will hang on every stalk,  
Each within the leafy bower;  
And for that promise spare the flower! 65

Dorothy told of her evening walk just at the time that the evening star was appearing and the reflections shone in the water. In a sonnet, her brother wrote:

Fair Star of evening, Splendor of the west,  
Star of my country! — on the horizon brink  
Thou hangeest, stooping, as might seem to sink  
On England's bosom. 66

During the time of a mountain ramble Dorothy wrote the story of a man being caught on a mountain in a storm and taking shelter in a chapel.

There are now no traces by which you could discover that the building had been different from a common sheepfold; the loose stones and the few which yet remained piled up are the same as those which lie about on the mountain; but the shape of the building being oblong is not that of a common sheepfold, and it stands east and west. Whether it was ever consecrated ground or not I know not; but the place may be kept holy in the memory of some now living in Patterdale; for it was the means of preserving the life of a poor old man last summer, who having gone up the mountain to gather peats, had been overtaken by a storm, and could not find his way down again. He happened to be near the remains of the old chapel, and, in a corner of it he contrived, by laying turf and ling and stones from one wall to the other, to make a shelter from the wind, and there he lay all night. The woman who had sent him on the errand began to grow uneasy towards night, and the neighbors went out to seek

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65 Wordsworth, William. Poems. p.

66 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 330.



hi him. At that time the old man had housed himself in his nest, and he heard the voices of the men, but could not make them hear, the wind was so loud, and he was afraid to leave the spot lest he should not be able to find it again, so he remained there all night; and they returned to their home giving him up for lost; but the next morning the same persons discovered him huddled up in the sheltered nook. He was at first stupefied and unable to move; but after he had eaten and drunk, and recollected himself a little, he walked down the mountain, and did not afterward seem to have suffered. <sup>67</sup>

Wordsworth wrote:

. . . but, till she spake,  
 Was wholly ignorant that my ancient Friend —  
 Who at her bidding, early and alone,  
 Had clomb aloft to delve the moorland turf  
 For winter fuel — to his noontide meal  
 Returned not, and now, haply, on the heights  
 Lay at the mercy of this raging storm.  
 'Inhuman!' — said I, 'was an old man's life  
 Worth not the trouble of a thought?' — Alas!  
 This notice comes too late! With joy I saw  
 Her husband enter — from a distant vale.  
 We sallied forth together; found the tools  
 Which the neglected veteran had dropped,  
 But through all quarters looked for him in vain.  
 We shouted — but no answer! Darkness fell  
 Without remission of the blast or shower,  
 And fears for our own safety drove us home.

. . . . .

All night long the storm endured, and, soon as help  
 Had been collected from the neighboring vale,  
 With morning we renewed our quest: the wind  
 Was fallen, the rain abated, but the hills  
 Lay shrouded in impenetrable mist;  
 And long and hopelessly we sought in vain:  
 Till chancing on that lofty ridge to pass  
 A heap of ruin — almost without walls  
 And wholly without roof (the bleached remains  
 Of a small chapel, where, in ancient time,  
 The peasants of these lonely valleys used  
 To meet for worship on that central height) —  
 We there espied the object of our search  
 Lying full three parts buried among tufts  
 Of heath-plant, under and above him strewn,  
 To baffle, as he might, the watery storm.

. . . . .

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<sup>67</sup>Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. p. 388.





So was he lifted gently from the ground,  
And with their freight homeward the shepherds moved  
Through the chill mist. . . 68

During one trip Dorothy and William visited the grave of Burns.

Dorothy wrote concerning this visit in her "Journals". In memory of this visit William wrote an "Address to the Sons of Ill Fated Poets". Much of the contents of this "Address" is taken from the prose of Dorothy.

We find also a number of instances of a few lines written during the years 1795-1805 that are curiously parallel to lines in Dorothy's "Journals".

Dorothy mentions, March 1, 1798, "the unseen birds singing in the mist". 69 William spoke of Dorothy in "The Recluse": "Her voice was like a hidden bird that sang". 70

In 1803 Dorothy wrote, "We sate by the fire and were happy, only our tender thoughts became painful". 71 The poet wrote on the same line in 1798,

I heard a thousand blended notes  
While in the grove I sate reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind. 72

Dorothy wrote:

The thought (in connection with the poem "The Butterfly") first came upon him as we were talking about the pleasures we both always felt at the sight of a butterfly, and I told him that I used to chase them a little, but I was afraid of brushing the dust off their wings and did not catch them. 73

In William's poem "To A Butterfly" he writes:

But she, God love her, feared to brush  
The dust from off its wings. 74

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68 Wordsworth, William. Poems. The Excursion, Bk. II. ll. 784-829.

69 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. Vol. II, p. 118.

70 Wordsworth, William. Poems.

71 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.

72 Wordsworth, William. Poems.

73 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.

74 Wordsworth, William. Poems. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1904.



Dorothy's statement concerning a glow-rock and a primrose that grew there is paralleled in William's poem "The Primrose of the Rock".

On March 18, 1798, Dorothy wrote in her "Journals": The withered leaves dance with the hailstones".<sup>75</sup> In the poem "A Whirl Blast From Behind the Hill" is found the same thought but in more of an elaborate poetical form. William's poem was written in 1799.

William Wordsworth's prose work "Guide to the Lakes" provides a striking parallel to Dorothy's prose work "Journal of a Mountain Ramble". The section entitled "Excursions to the top of Scawfell and on the Banks of Ullswater" William said:

I am reduced to subjoin an account of a short excursion through more accessible parts of the country made at a time when it is seldom seen but by the inhabitants.<sup>76</sup>

From here he goes on to give a recount of his sister's "Journal of a Mountain Ramble". It was changed so as to omit the personal element in Dorothy's work. Let us look at some samples taken from the two essays which show very strong parallels.

Dorothy wrote:

Owing to the brightness of the sunshine the church and other buildings were even more concealed from us than by the mists the other day. It had been a sharp frost in the night, and the trees and grass were yet wet. We observed the lemon-colored leaves of the birches in the wood below, as the wind turned them to the sun, sparkle, or rather flash, like diamonds. The day continued unclouded to the end.<sup>77</sup>

William wrote:

The dazzling sunbeams, striking upon the church and village, while the earth was steaming with exhalations not traceable in other

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<sup>75</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.

<sup>76</sup> Wordsworth, William. Prose Works. 3 vols. Grosart, 1876.

<sup>77</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.





quarter, rendered their forms even more indistinct than the partial and flitting veil of unilluminated vapour had done two days before. The grass on which we had trod and the trees in every thicket, were dripping with melted hoar-frost. We observed the lemon-colored leaves of the birches, as the breeze turned them to the sun, sparkle or rather flash, like diamonds, and the leafless purple twigs were tipped with globes of shining crystal. <sup>78</sup>

In this quotation we find that the thought is the same, the diction is the same except that it is more elaborate, and more complete. No doubt, the reason this was not entered as a journal of his sister's is that she was not willing for her work to be published. She enjoyed giving suggestions of subjects to her brother and helping him in revising his poems. She could have become a poet if she had devoted herself to it, but her time was mostly spent in helping her brother. Her poetical ability is shown in her prose. She did write five poems, most of them for children. One, "Floating Island", expresses the harmony and everlastingness of Nature as is found so often in the poems of her brother:

Harmonious powers with Nature work  
On sky, earth, river, lake and sea;  
Sunshine and cloud, whirlwind and breeze,  
All in one duteous task agree.

Once did I see a slip of earth  
(By throbbing waves long undermined)  
Loosed from its hold; how, no one knew,  
But all might see it float, obedient to the wind.

Might see it from the mossy shore  
Discovered, float upon the Lake,  
Float with its crest of trees adorned  
On which the warbling birds their pastime take.

Food, shelter, safety, there they find;  
There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;  
There insects live their life and die;  
A peopled world it is; in size a tiny room.

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<sup>78</sup> Wordsworth, William. Prose Works. 3 vols. Grosart, 1876.



And thus through many seasons' space  
 This little island may survive;  
 But Nature, though we mark her not,  
 Will take away, may cease to give.

Perchance when you are wandering forth  
 Upon some vacant summer day,  
 Without an object, hope or fear,  
 Thither your eyes may turn — the Isle is passed away.

Buried beneath the glittering Lake,  
 Its place no longer to be found;  
 Yet the lost fragments shall remain  
 To fertilize some other ground.<sup>79</sup>

An example of her poetic prose is shown in her "Description of the Scenery of the Lakes":

The sun had been set some time, though we could only just perceive that the daylight was partly gone, and the lake was more brilliant than before. . . A delightful evening; the Seven Stars close to the hill - tops in Patterdale; all the stars seemed brighter than usual. The steeps were reflected in Brotherswater, and above the lake appeared like enormous black perpendicular walls. The torrents of Kirkstone had been swollen by the rains, and filled the mountain pass with their roaring, which added greatly to the solemnity of our walk. The stars in succession took their stations on the mountain-tops. Behind us, when we had climbed very high, we saw one light in the vale at a great distance, like a large star, a solitary one, in the gloomy region. All the cheerfulness of the scene was in the sky above us. . .<sup>80</sup>

What do all these parallelisms prove or show? They prove that Dorothy's conversations were suggestive to her brother of poetical subjects of which he made use. Also, her interest in Nature — in the birds, the butterflies, the flowers; in persons met and scenes viewed; was ever helpful to him. Her "Journals" are filled with the details of all these, and there is no doubt but what her brother used them in his poetry.

Dorothy had a literary gift, which in its own way has never been surpassed. For example, writing at Alfoxden on February 4, 1798, she gives a

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<sup>79</sup> Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals. London: Macmillan, 1941.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Description of the Scenery of the Lakes", pp. 411-412.





typical passage:

Walked a great part of the way to Stowey with Coleridge. The morning warm and sunny. The young lasses seen on the hill-top, in the villages and roads, in their summer holiday clothes — pink petticoats and blue. Mothers with children in their arms, and the little ones that could just walk, tottering by their side. Midges or small flies spinning in the sunshine; the songs of the lark and redbreast; daisies upon the turf; the hazels in bloom; honeysuckles budding. I saw one solitary strawberry flower under a hedge. The furze gay with blossoms. The moss rubbed from the palings by the sheep, that leave locks of wool, and the red marks with which they were spotted, upon the wool. 81

Dorothy made no attempt to describe or to record her state of soul. Her only object was to set down her impressions so that she wouldn't forget them. But she succeeded in writing beautifully and making people feel the beauty of the things she had seen. Her brother shows this trait in "The Prelude":

She welcom'd what was given, and craved no more.  
 Whatever scene was present to her eyes,  
 That was the best, to that she was attuned  
 Through her humility and lowliness,  
 And through a perfect happiness of soul  
 Whose variegated feelings were in this  
 Sisters: that they were each some new delight;  
 For she was Nature's intimate. Her birds  
 And every flower she met with, could they but  
 Have known her, would have lov'd.

Methought such charm  
 Of sweetness did her presence breathe around  
 That all the trees, and all the silent hills  
 And everything she look'd on, should have had  
 An intimation how she bore herself  
 Towards them and to all creatures. 82

Coleridge had been a friend of the Wordsworths for a very long time. In writing to Miss Agnes Scott he says of Dorothy:

Dorothy Wordsworth, the sister of our great Poet, is a woman of Genius, as well as of manifold acquirements; and but for the

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81 Wordsworth, Dorothy. Journals.

82 Wordsworth, William. Poems. The Prelude.



absorption of her whole soul in her Brother's fame and writings would, perhaps in a different style, have been a great poet as himself. <sup>83</sup>

Dorothy did not claim to be a poet. She felt that her mission was to point out to William things which would have escaped his notice and which he made into poetry. She had a very quick power of observation. She wrote a few poems but could not manage the meter as well as William. Her poetry showed sympathy with Nature and with people, an observation which was a marvel of minute exactness, and a literary style of setting down her impressions that was always her own.

From the diaries of Dorothy Wordsworth there is every evidence that her observation and records were made with a poet's eye and intuition. According to Garrod she frequently uses poetic diction.

"The sound of the sea distinctly heard on the tops of the hills, which we could never hear in summer. We attribute this partly to the bareness of the trees, but chiefly to the absence of the singing of the birds, the hum of insects, that noiseless noise which lives in the summer air!" There if any one feels inclined to cry 'Wordsworth' (for nothing could be more Wordsworthian), at least let him remember that it was of Dorothy that Wordsworth said, "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears". Lesser effects are almost equally fine, — I choose almost at random: "The road to the village of Holford glittered like another stream"; "The still trees only gently bowed their heads, as if listening to the wind"; "I was much amused with the busyness of a pair of stonechats; their restless voices as they skimmed along the water, following each other, their shadows under them, and then returning back to the stones on the shore, chirping with the same unwearied voice. . . Grasmere very solemn is the last glimpse of twilight. It calls home the heart to quietness." "The waves round about the little Island seemed like a dance of Spirits that rose out of the water"; "Our favourite birch-tree. It was yielding to the gusty wind with all its tender twigs. The sun shone upon it, and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower. It was a tree in shape, with stem and branches; but it was like a Spirit of water." <sup>84</sup>

Therefore, a study of the prose and poetry of Dorothy and William

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<sup>83</sup> Maynard, Theodore. Wordsworth's Exquisite Sister. From The Catholic World; 411 West 59th Street, New York: Office of "The Catholic World", 1935. p.526.

<sup>84</sup> Garrod, H. W. Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, p. 226.





Wordsworth brings us to the conclusion that Dorothy's interest in Nature and in poetry brought her brother in 1794 from metaphysics back to his old interest in Nature and poetry; and that her influence was especially great between the years 1795 and 1805, as is shown by the parallel cases giving evidence of the debt which her brother owed to her "Journals".

Many and varied influences help to settle the career of an individual. Two lives coming in contact with each other tend to give greater vitality and start an unknown future.

It has been found that the most commanding of human influences is a woman. She may be a mother, a sister, or a wife who has acted as a guide through the greater part of a man's life. Many times the influence of a sister is the greatest. This happens frequently when the mother dies while the brother and sister are young.



## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY

Dorothy bore no insignificant part in the influence she had on William in his poetry. During his early life she manifested a predominant part in that work and was to a great extent instrumental in introducing a new evangel of song to literature of that time which has come down through the centuries.

Dorothy was the close companion and stimulator of this great poet during the years of preparation and discipline. It was she who first couched his eye to the sense of beauty. Nature through her influence was revealed in a clearer and brighter light; calling us away from the lower cares of life, and uplifting us to a higher plane and bringing an atmosphere of rest, making us capable of higher good, of nobler acts, of greater enjoyment which before were unknown.

Wordsworth, with his sister, seemed to possess the earth. His powers of perception were intensified and rarified. The solitude of Nature became their home and in it their hearts grew to understand its loveliness and solemnity.

It was she who moderated the sternness of his moody temper. His chief delight was in scenes distinguished by grandeur, and she taught him the beauty of the simplest products and the mildest graces of Nature. What had been harsh in Wordsworth was toned by the womanly sweetness of his sister, and his spirit was softened by her habitual tenderness of thought and act. She saw for him, heard for him, read for him, found subjects for





his thoughts, and wrote for him. She dedicated her life to him. Her mental capacity and literary skill would have enabled her to have won for herself a high position in life but she preferred to yield herself to making a future for her brother.

Wordsworth is one of the many who have elevated and enriched English literature; and none of the influences which entered his life, and served to build up his poetry, and to complete his work, have been as great as the aid and influence of his sister Dorothy.

The influence of Dorothy is the story of a brother's and sister's love one for the other. It is a self-sacrificing love. It brought its reward as Wordsworth has "crowned her with immortality". As Mr. Paxton Hood said,

Not Laura with Petrarch, nor Beatrice with Dante,  
nor the fair Geraldine with Surrey, are more really connected  
than is Wordsworth with his sister Dorothy. 85

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85 Lee, Edmund, Story of a Sister's Love. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1895. P. 18.



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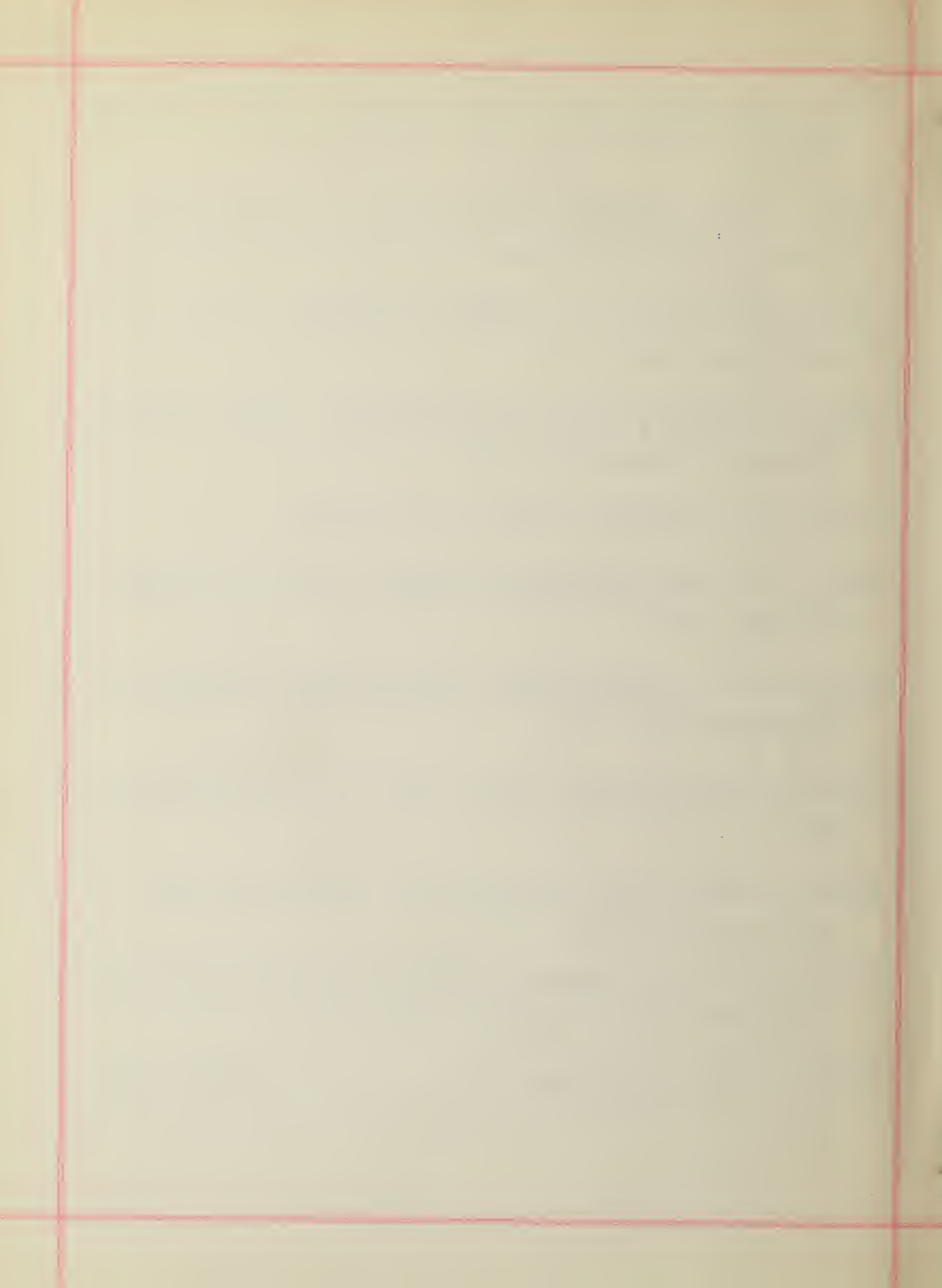


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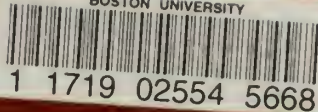








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